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U.S. POLICY CONCERNING TAIWAN: DO WE HAVE IT RIGHT?

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

U.S. Policy Concerning Taiwan: Do We Have It Right?

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Colonel Christopher J. Parker
TITLE: U.S. Policy Concerning Taiwan: Do We Have It Right?
FORMAT: Strategy Research Project
DATE: 10 April 2001 PAGES: 27 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

The democratic government of Taiwan and the majority of its 23 million people seek recognition by the United Nations and resist forced reunification with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Current United States policy concerning Taiwan is ambiguous and could fail to ensure the attainment of our national interests in East Asia and the Pacific. This ambiguous policy may have been partially responsible for a confrontation between U.S. and the PRC in the Taiwan Strait in 1996. This paper provides brief historical background information on Taiwan and its relationship with the PRC and describes current U.S. policy. The inherent policy flaws may precipitate a confrontation between the PRC and the United States in the Taiwan Strait in the future. This paper outlines alternative policies, and recommends modifications to existing U.S. policy.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author acknowledges the support of Lieutenant Colonel Debra R. Little, Project Advisor, and Robert H. "Robin" Dorff, Ph.D., General Maxwell D. Taylor Chair and Professor of National Security Policy and Strategy Department of National Security and Strategy. Their assistance and critiques contributed greatly to this paper.

U.S. POLICY CONCERNING TAIWAN: DO WE HAVE IT RIGHT?

"It is the policy of the United States...to consider any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts or embargoes, a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States; to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character; and to maintain that capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan."

—Taiwan Relations Act 1979¹

"We want you to understand that we will defend Taiwan. Period."

—House Speaker Newt Gingrich, 1997²

"The U.S. doesn't support independence for Taiwan, or two China's, or one Taiwan-one China, and Taiwan shouldn't be a member of any organization for which statehood is a requirement."

—William Jefferson Clinton, 1998³

"Whereas the Republic of China on Taiwan (known as Taiwan) is the United States' fifth largest trading partner and an economic powerhouse buying more than twice as much annually from the United States as do the 1.2 billion Chinese of the People's Republic of China...it is the sense of the Senate that United States policy toward Taiwan should...support a proposal in the 48th General Assembly of the United Nations for formal observer status for Taiwan as a first step towards full membership in the United Nations..."

—United States Senate Resolution 270⁴

The democratic government of Taiwan and the majority of its 23 million people resist forced reunification with the People's Republic of China (PRC).⁵ Current United States policy concerning Taiwan is ambiguous and could fail to ensure the attainment of our national interests of maintaining peace, security, and stability in the Western Pacific.⁶ As expressed above, various congressional acts and communiqüs conflict with the statements and actions of the executive branch of the United States government. Such incongruities result in the U.S. policy being perceived as ambiguous and unclear. This ambiguous policy may have been partially responsible for a confrontation between the U.S. and the PRC in the Taiwan Strait in 1996, and may contribute to future confrontations.

This paper provides brief historical background information on Taiwan and its relationship with the PRC. This paper also describes current U.S. policy and its inherent flaws that may have helped precipitate a confrontation between the PRC and the United States in the Taiwan Strait. Additionally, this paper discusses the current level of arms sales to Taiwan and makes recommendations concerning future sales. Lastly, this paper concludes with a section that

presents alternative policies and makes recommendations for modifications to the existing U.S. policy.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A major source of conflict between the PRC and Taiwan is the desire of many Taiwanese for autonomy. To better understand the issue of Taiwan and its desire for autonomy, it is important to be familiar with the history of Taiwan and its relationship with mainland China. This section provides a brief historical summary of Taiwan beginning with early migrations of Chinese people from the mainland to Taiwan.

Across several centuries Taiwan, previously known as the Island of Formosa, was the destination of numerous migrants from mainland China. Chinese migrants settled in the Taiwan coastal and inland areas and pushed the indigenous population to the highlands of the island.⁷

In the nineteenth century Taiwan first became a colony of Spain, and then the Dutch.⁸ In 1885, mainland China formally controlled and governed Taiwan, but only for ten years. In 1895, Taiwan became a colony of Japan as a result of a Sino-Japanese treaty. Taiwan remained under Japanese control until the end of World War Two when General MacArthur removed Taiwan as a possession of Japan and instructed General Chiang Kai-shek to "administer" Taiwan.⁹ In 1948, Taiwan formally initiated the National Mobilization for Suppression of the Communist Rebellion. In effect, a state of civil war between China and Taiwan existed upon enactment of that mobilization.¹⁰

In 1949 General Chiang Kai-shek was exiled to Taiwan following his defeat by the Communists and their take-over of mainland China. During negotiations in San Francisco in 1951, Taiwan was formally removed from all claims of ownership by Japan. However, no formal benefactor was designated for Taiwan, nor was Taiwan designated as an independent state at this time. Although General Chiang Kai-Shek continued administrative control, no lasting designation of Taiwan's status was outlined in the treaty. The expectation at the time was the United Nations would eventually make a determination concerning Taiwan and its status as a nation.¹¹

The United Nations failed to make a timely determination of Taiwan's status, which left Taiwan in a state of uncertainty. From a Taiwanese perspective, China/PRC was never a legitimate government for Taiwan. Many of the Taiwanese people believe that although the PRC and Taiwan share a similar culture, their historical experiences are divergent and Taiwan should be an independent nation state.¹²

TAIWAN'S STATUS AS A NATION STATE

The issue of Taiwan and its struggle for international recognition is extremely complex. For a brief period, General Chiang Kai-shek and his government based in Taiwan were recognized as the legitimate representatives of both Taiwan and mainland China. However, in 1971 the United Nations passed Resolution 2758, which formally seated the PRC into the United Nations and expelled the representatives of Chiang Kai-shek. In the eyes of the United Nations, this resolution acknowledged the legitimacy of the Peoples Republic of China's Communist government and its right to represent the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people. However, this resolution continued to cast uncertainty on the status of Taiwan and its claim to represent all of China as the Republic of China.¹³

In spite of Resolution 2758, Taiwan continues to meet prerequisite requirements to be recognized as an independent nation state. The United Nation's requirements to become a member of the Assembly are:

- 1) The applicant must be a state (country).
- 2) It must be peace loving.
- 3) It must accept the obligations of the United Nations' Charter.
- 4) It must be able and willing to carry out the charter obligations.¹⁴

Taiwan's population of 23 million is greater than the populations of three-quarters of the United Nations' current member states; greater than Australia; and greater than Norway, Sweden and Finland combined.¹⁵ Additionally, given Taiwan's democratic government, Taiwan's population is self-determining and therefore accurately considered to be a nation whose government is in power by virtue of the will of the people. Finally, Taiwan's economy is very robust and certainly representative of an independent nation state capable of contributing to the economic well being of the international community.¹⁶ For these reasons, Taiwan technically qualifies to be a member of the Assembly.

FOREIGN STATES' POLICIES

This section provides a short discussion on policies of various nation states. An awareness of how other nations interact with Taiwan is beneficial when reviewing U.S. policy toward Taiwan and subsequently analyzing U.S. policy. Taiwan's status as a nation state is not recognized by all players in the international arena including the United Nations and especially the PRC.¹⁷ While Taiwan policies differ among nations, in general states do not want to alienate the PRC and lose the economic benefits that can be potentially be gained by fostering a cordial, if not close relationship with Beijing. Currently several countries maintain informal relations with

Taiwan. Both the Australian and German policies are illustrative examples of how a country can effectively balance policies with Beijing and Taipei.

AUSTRALIAN POLICY

William O'Chee, Senator for Australia, opines that Taiwan must make its own case to the United Nations concerning its status. O'Chee's writings provide keen insight into the reason many nation states choose to adopt a supportive, yet informal, relationship with Taiwan. According to Senator O'Chee, Australia enjoys a profitable trade relationship with Taiwan. At the same time however, Australia fully realizes the economic potential inherent in the PRC with its population approaching two billion people. O'Chee indicates that while Australia recognizes the argument presented by Taiwan concerning their right to be recognized as an independent nation, Australia is unlikely to do anything that would potentially upset their relationship with the PRC resulting in a loss of a lucrative economic market.¹⁸

GERMAN POLICY

In the past, Germany's relations with Taiwan have been limited. Recently however, contacts between Germany and Taiwan are on the rise. As with Australia, Germany recognizes the vast potential for economic benefit to Germany from the PRC. As a consequence, Professor Barbara Krug, University of Saarland, Germany states "the flag does not follow trade in German-Taiwan relations." Essentially, economic factors will determine Taiwan-PRC-German relations to a greater degree than political factors. Professor Krug also states that the consensus in Germany is that the PRC "holds the key" to future developments in Taiwan relationships.¹⁹

Germany's interactions with Taiwan also includes supporting Taiwan in its attempts to enter some international organizations in the economic arena. Support from Germany for Taiwan actions beyond those economically oriented is limited. Professor Krug recommends Taiwan pursue direct negotiations with the PRC and whenever possible obtain consent from Beijing for its actions. Short of tacit approval of the PRC, Taiwan should pursue participation to the greatest degree possible in whatever international organizations it can obtain membership.²⁰

Many nations express their understanding and sympathy towards Taiwan and its struggle for international status. It is clear however, that few nations will support Taiwan in a direct challenge to the United Nations for admission into the Assembly. While nations are sympathetic, they are also keenly aware of the economic and political ramifications of rejecting the desires of the PRC to someday gain greater control of Taiwan.²¹

UNITED STATES' POLICY TOWARD TAIWAN

The United States' policy toward Taiwan is defined in a series of documents and statements. Policymakers must take into account the goal of the PRC to reunify with Taiwan as well as the economic, diplomatic, and military capabilities of both the PRC and Taiwan.

As with many nations, the United States recognizes the vast economic potential of the PRC. The U.S. also recognizes the PRC as a nuclear capable state and also as a member of the United Nations Security Council, all of which naturally tend to shape U.S. policy towards Taiwan and the PRC. As a member of the Security Council, the PRC can veto any resolution that would admit Taiwan into the United Nations. As a nuclear capable state, the PRC has the capability to cause massive destruction with nuclear tipped missiles.

In general, United States policy "acknowledges" the Chinese position that Taiwan is part of China, yet the U.S. policy is also one that "would view with grave concern" any hostile actions toward Taiwan. The U.S. agrees with PRC to limit the sale of defensive weapons to Taiwan, but only as long as the PRC agrees to pursue peaceful solutions to the issue.²²

In 1978 the United States sent a communiqué to the PRC recognizing the PRC as the sole legal government of China and acknowledged the Chinese position that Taiwan is part of China.²³ In an apparent departure from that communiqué, in 1979 the U.S. Congress signed the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), which is the basis for current U.S. policy. It states that: "It is the policy of the United States...to consider any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts or embargoes, a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States; to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character; and to maintain that capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan."²⁴

U.S. policy is further defined in a joint communiqué between PRC and the United States in 1982. In that communiqué, the PRC stated its fundamental policy was to strive toward a peaceful solution to the Taiwan issue, and the United States responded stating its intentions were to gradually reduce arms sales to Taiwan.²⁵ In a subsequent communiqué to Taiwan the United States stated it would not:

1. Set a date for ending arms sales.
2. Hold prior consultations with Beijing on arms sales to Taiwan.
3. Mediate between Taipei and Beijing.
4. Press Taiwan to negotiate with the PRC.

5. Revise the TRA.
6. Change its position concerning Taiwan's sovereignty.²⁶

Furthering the confusion with the already ambiguous policy, several resolutions passed in the House and Senate show increased support for Taiwan in the legislative branch. In 1994 the Senate passed a resolution supporting Taiwan's bid for U.N. membership.²⁷ In 1995, the House and Senate both passed a resolution to allow Taiwan's President Lee to make a private visit to the United States. President Clinton approved the visit at the extreme displeasure of Beijing because it felt that both resolutions were outside the provisions of the TRA.²⁸

During his visit to China in 1998, President Clinton stated that: "The U.S. doesn't support independence for Taiwan, or two Chinas, or one Taiwan-one China, and Taiwan shouldn't be a member of any organization for which statehood is a requirement."²⁹ The President's remark concerning membership in organizations requiring statehood is in excess of the provisions of the TRA.

The current national security strategy does not clarify the U.S. Taiwan policy. The intent of the strategy is: "To help maintain peace, security, and stability in the Western Pacific and to promote our broad foreign policy objectives we are implementing fully the terms of the Taiwan Relations Act by maintaining robust unofficial relations between the American people and the people of Taiwan. Our key security objectives for the future include: sustaining the strategic dialogue begun by the recent summits and other high-level exchanges; enhancing stability in the Taiwan Strait through maintenance of our "one China" policy, peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues and encouraging dialogue between Beijing and Taipei..."³⁰

Finally, although the U.S. continues to sell arms to Taiwan, the U.S. is currently withholding transfer of advanced air-to-air missiles. Additionally, current U.S. plans do not include the transfer of a theater missile defense system when the technology becomes available. Without advanced air-to-air missiles and a theater missile defense system, Taiwan is less capable of meeting a PRC military threat.³¹ This policy is subject to change under the newly elected Bush Administration.

The inconsistent policy toward Taiwan between the legislative and executive branches reduces ability of the U.S. to meet its regional objectives. By sending mixed signals, there is a potential for Taiwan and the PRC to become agitated with the U.S. which tends to increase tensions in the region. Additionally, by not selling arms to Taiwan at a level adequate to counter PRC military advancements, the PRC may choose to attempt forceful reunification at some point in the future.

CONFRONTATION IN THE TAIWAN STRAIT

The ambiguous policy on the part of the United States concerning Taiwan may have in part been responsible for a serious confrontation between U.S. and PRC military forces in 1995-1996. The genesis of the 1995-1996 confrontation occurred in 1988 when the PRC aggressively started pursuing its interest and claims to the Spratley Islands. The PRC occupied areas of the Spratleys claimed by the Philippines, and during confrontations with Vietnam, sunk three Vietnamese naval vessels. This drew criticism of the PRC by the world politic.³²

The 1989 Beijing massacre further degraded the world's opinion of the PRC and diminished perceptions that the PRC was moving towards being a more benevolent power. Many in the international community changed their opinions about the PRC and its intentions.³³ These events helped Taiwan gain favorable consideration from a number of nations concerning its bid for independence and recognition of Taiwan by the United Nations.

Concurrently with these actions, Indonesia signed a security treaty with Australia, and the Philippines signed mutual security agreements with Great Britain. Additionally, the U.S. took steps to start normalizing relations with Vietnam, as well as giving indications of the possibility of future security agreements with India. As a result of these activities it can be argued that the PRC felt it was losing significant credibility in the region.

Taiwan's legislative elections in 1995 and presidential election in 1996 further complicated these events. Taiwan was about to solidify its efforts to become a true democracy. Exacerbating the situation was the fact that various political candidates were making strong statements concerning independence for Taiwan.³⁴

In July and August of 1995, the PRC started a series of military exercises that included the launching of several long-range missiles from the PRC into the shipping lanes between Taiwan and Japan. In July 1995 the PRC launched four M-9 missiles and two DF-21 missiles into the sea-lanes close to Taiwan. The M-9 has a range of approximately 600 kilometers and the M-21 has a range of over one thousand miles. These "test shots" were followed in August by six more missile launchings into the target area.³⁵

The U.S. did not initiate a military response until December of 1995, and then only a symbolic show of force of one aircraft carrier passing through the Taiwan Strait. In Garver's view, the PRC took this weak response as a dwindling of U.S. resolve to militarily defend Taiwan in the event of an invasion. Consequently, the PRC carried out extensive exercises in March 1996 just prior to the presidential elections. These exercises included over 300 aircraft, various ships and submarines, and some 150,000 troops from the PRC's People's Liberation Army (PLA). The main thrust of the exercise was an amphibious landing on an island whose

topography compared closely with that of Taiwan.³⁶ In conjunction with the exercises, three M-9 missiles were launched on 8 March, and one additional missile was fired on 13 March. The target areas for these missiles were even closer to Taiwan than the 1995 test firings. The impact area for the missiles fired on 8 March was within 50 miles of Keelung, Taiwan. The 13 March impact area was within 50 miles of Kaohsiung. With these firings, the PRC clearly demonstrated its capability to hit targets in Taiwan with missiles.³⁷

These exercises were accompanied by strong rhetoric on the part of the PRC. One PRC official in a meeting with the Deputy Secretary of Defense stated that the PRC "could act militarily against Taiwan because the U.S. cares a lot more about Los Angeles than Taiwan."³⁸ Other rhetoric included statements by a high-ranking PLA officer that the PLA was "fully able to handle modern high-tech warfare."³⁹

The U.S. response to these exercises was the deployment of two carrier battle groups (CVBG) to the region. Garver points out that one CVBG could be construed as a show of force, but that two groups represented real military power. In general, a CVBG consists of one Nimitz class aircraft carrier with approximately 85 aircraft, two cruisers armed with Tomahawk and Standard Missiles, a guided missile destroyer, an antisubmarine frigate, an attack submarine capable of sinking surface ships and submarines, and support ships as required. Again, two CVBG's represent significant combat power and provided the U.S. with the capability to not only inflict significant combat losses on the PRC forces, but also provided the U.S. the ability to strike the PRC mainland if desired.

Garver also indicates once the situation escalated, it quickly became one in which both sides took steps to ensure all parties concerned did not take any confrontational military actions. The PRC never massed its air forces, never crossed the "mid-line" of the strait with its conventional forces, and did not shadow U.S. carriers with its submarines as it had done in the past. The U.S. opted to stay to the north and south of Taiwan, and technically out of the Strait altogether.⁴⁰ In this way, Garver posits, both sides were able to achieve its objectives and win important political points within their respective centers of influence. Garver concludes his analysis by stating that this situation was extremely dangerous, and were it not for the carefully calculated actions on the part of the various military commanders, dire consequences could have occurred.⁴¹

ANALYSIS

The ambiguous and unclear policy of the United States concerning Taiwan may have left the PRC doubting the resolve of the United States to defend the PRC militarily. While we may

never fully know the true intentions of the PRC concerning these exercises, it is conceivable the exercises were a prelude to a military attack on Taiwan if the U.S. would have failed to respond. The continued ambiguity and lack of precision in U.S. policy from administration to administration leaves the PRC and the world in doubt concerning U.S. resolve toward Taiwan. A continuation of this policy of ambiguity, coupled with the aforementioned inadequate arms sales to Taiwan leave in place the same “political chemistry” that may have helped precipitate the 1995-1996 confrontation in the Taiwan Strait.

Additionally, the PRC recently announced in a white paper it would not wait indefinitely for negotiations to reunite Taiwan and threatened the use of military force if Taipei drags its heels.⁴² This strong statement may indicate the PRC believes U.S. resolve to defend Taiwan is still in question and could be the result of continued ambiguity in U.S. policy. As such, U.S. policy toward Taiwan should be reviewed.

POLICY CRITIQUE

United States policy can be separated into two broad categories: diplomatic policy and policy regarding arms sales.

DIPLOMATIC POLICY

Current U.S. diplomatic policy is ambiguous in several ways. The TRA states the U.S. would have “grave concern” in the event of hostile activities towards Taiwan. “Grave concern” is not further defined and can be interpreted across the entire response spectrum from total diplomatic, economic, informational, and military means to no response at all. This can lead to misinterpretation of U.S. intentions by both the PRC and Taiwan, or by any other countries in the region.

United States’ policy ambiguity is not limited to the TRA. Various political leaders making statements concerning Taiwan that send different signals supplement that ambiguity. As an example, Newt Gingrich’s statement to the Chinese, “We want you to understand we will defend Taiwan. Period,” is clearly aggressive in nature.⁴³ In contrast, the remarks made by President Clinton in 1998; “The U.S. doesn’t support independence for Taiwan, or two China’s, or one Taiwan-one China, and Taiwan shouldn’t be a member of any organization for which statehood is a requirement.”⁴⁴, seems much less aggressive towards the PRC and somewhat conciliatory in its tone. This two-toned diplomatic policy leaves too much to individual interpretation. Although it allows diplomatic flexibility for the U.S., the results of misinterpretation could be disastrous.

POLICY ON ARMS SALES

The TRA allows for the U.S. to provide Taiwan with arms of a "defensive character." A capabilities analysis submitted in response to the FY 99 Appropriation Bill states the PRC would find it difficult to mount a successful invasion of Taiwan at this time. However, this same review indicates the PRC is upgrading its air force with fourth generation aircraft.⁴⁵

The PRC is developing the F-10 for domestic production and is expected to carry advanced beyond visual range-active radar air-to-air missiles. Potentially, the F-10 will be air refuelable. The PRC is also domestically producing the SU-27. Originally purchased from Russia, these aircraft have sufficient combat radius to allow for combat operations beyond the borders of the PRC.⁴⁶ Taiwan's fighter aircraft consist mainly of U.S. built F-16s, French Mirage 2000-5s, and a locally produced Indigenous Defense Fighter. While these aircraft possess reasonable capabilities, without further buildup in either quantity or capability, the balance of power in fighter aircraft will continue to favor the PRC.⁴⁷

The PRC reportedly has an advantage in air-to-air missiles over Taiwan. The PRC possesses the AA-11 Archer missile which uses infrared tracking and is compatible with the SU-27. The AA-11 is superior in capabilities to Taiwan's AIM-9 Sidewinder missile and its indigenously produced Tien Chen-I Sky Sword-I infrared air-to-air missile.⁴⁸ By comparison, the AIM-9 missile was used during the Vietnam War, and its technology is over thirty years old. As a result, counter measures readily exist for the missiles in the Taiwan inventory. Given this inferiority, Taiwan would have a difficult time overcoming the superior numbers of PRC advanced fighter aircraft.

The PRC's bomber aircraft consist of the B-5 Beagle and the B-6 Badger. The B-5 is considered to be extremely vulnerable, however the B-6 is being produced in several variants. At least one variant is being developed that will be capable of striking Taiwan with an air launched cruise missile.⁴⁹ The PRC also recently developed the capability to strike Taiwan with either conventional or nuclear missiles, as demonstrated during the crisis in the Taiwan Strait in 1996.

Currently, the U.S. is withholding transfer of advanced air-to-air missiles to Taiwan.⁵⁰ As previously mentioned, without advanced air-to-air missiles in the Taiwan inventory, the PRC's advanced fighter aircraft will continue to loom as a threat and Taiwan will become increasingly vulnerable. The PRC's recently demonstrated capability to strike Taiwan with long range ballistic missiles constitute and even more ominous threat as Taiwan is extremely vulnerable to ballistic missile attack. Without a robust missile defense system, Taiwan is less able to convincingly counter any PRC threats and is certainly vulnerable to an actual attack. This

leaves in doubt the ability of Taiwan's military remain a credible deterrent in the 2005 timeframe.⁵¹

United States' policy toward Taiwan is ambiguous and vulnerable to interpretation. U.S. political leaders and lawmakers repeatedly send ambiguous and sometimes conflicting messages concerning U.S. policy. Additionally, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan are inadequate to meet growing PRC threats. This inadequacy is perhaps most apparent in the Taiwanese being insufficiently prepared to defend against a PRC conventional or nuclear missile strike.

ALTERNATIVE POLICIES

Four alternative U.S. policies the U.S. could adopt concerning Taiwan are presented:

1) completely withdraw from any engagement on the reunification issue and let Taiwan and the PRC resolve the issue; 2) support Taiwan in a bid for independence; 3) pressure Taiwan to accept the PRC offer of "one-China, two systems" similar to the PRC-Hong Kong arrangement and; 4) modify current U.S. policy.

The first alternative policy, completely withdraw from any engagement on the reunification issue and let Taiwan and the PRC resolve the matter, has the merit of removing the U.S. from the role of international policymaker and moderator. However, without continued support to Taiwan within the construct of the TRA, in the future the PRC will likely possess the capability to forcibly unify Taiwan. This would alter the balance of power and therefore put in jeopardy our regional objectives. This policy does not have an acceptable risk because our objectives of regional stability would be challenged if the PRC initiated a forced reunification. Additionally, if the PRC attempted to unify using military means, the U.S. would be forced to either accept reunification or militarily defend Taiwan. A forceful reunification, if successful, would jeopardize the economic benefits Taiwan provides as the United States' sixth largest trading partner.⁵² The possible loss of such an economic partner in the region is an unacceptable risk.

The second alternative policy, supporting Taiwan in a bid for independence, would provide the U.S. with a democratic economic partner potentially recognized as a nation state in the UN. However, the PRC's reaction to such a policy would be predictably harsh. Military action by the PRC against Taiwan could ensue resulting in the obvious loss of stability in the region. As a minimum, U.S.-PRC relations would certainly be degraded and the U.S. could lose its market share of the vast economic potential of the PRC.⁵³ As with option one, the possible loss of such an important economic partner in the region is not an acceptable risk.

The third alternative policy, pressuring Taiwan to accept the PRC offer of "one-China, two systems" similar to the PRC-Hong Kong arrangement, could result in the loss once again of a

democratic trading partner in the region. Although the PRC-Hong Kong relationship is mutually beneficial to both entities at this point, the arrangement is still very new and Beijing's future actions toward Hong Kong are uncertain.⁵⁴ While U.S.-PRC relations would benefit if the U.S. pressured Taiwan to accept the PRC offer, the political price in the international arena would be prohibitive. The U.S. frequently states its desire to promote democracy. Should the U.S. give up on a democratic Taiwan in favor of the PRC, the world could view the U.S. as being a nation that favors economic benefit over democratic ideals. Additionally, Taiwan could potentially opt to forcibly resist reunification. As with the previous policy alternatives, the U.S. risks the loss of Taiwan as a significant trading partner, which is not acceptable.⁵⁵

The fourth policy option is to modify existing U.S. policy. By strengthening our current policy through modifications, the U.S. will continue to meet its regional security objectives while concurrently encouraging a democratic Taiwan and realizing continued economic benefits from both Taiwan and the PRC.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

United States's policy regarding Taiwan should be modified as follows:

First, eliminate disconnects between the legislative and executive branches concerning U.S. Taiwan policy. Establish a non-partisan committee led by the newly installed Bush Administration. The committee should draft a resolution acceptable to both branches that has as its foundation the 1979 TRA.

Secondly, the U.S. should go forward with military sales as needed to ensure the Taiwan military maintains a credible deterrent to 2005 and beyond. Allow for sales of advanced air-to-air missiles and other weapons systems as necessary. In addition to missile sales, if the PRC does not take action to provide an acceptable degree of assurance that the threat of missile attack against Taiwan is unwarranted, the U.S. should provide Taiwan with a theater missile defense system.

Lastly, state in written policy the United States will defend Taiwan militarily should the PRC choose to reunify Taiwan by force. At the same time, however, the U.S. should caution Taiwan to not increase its efforts to become an independent nation state in such a manner as to precipitate an attack on Taiwan in accordance with the PRC White Paper.

Second and third order effects of this policy include initial consternation and saber rattling on the part of the PRC. However, the PRC is not currently economically or militarily capable of reuniting Taiwan by force. It is in the PRC's best interest economically to continue to cooperate where possible with the United States. With intensive diplomatic efforts and the

granting of economic benefits to the PRC in exchange for its cooperation in not pursuing a forcible reunification, such sales can be accomplished with acceptable perturbations in PRC relations.

CONCLUSION

Current United States policy concerning Taiwan is ambiguous and could fail to ensure the attainment of our national interests in East Asia and the Pacific. This ambiguous policy may have been partially responsible for the confrontation between U.S. and the PRC in the Taiwan Strait in 1996. The inherent policy flaws may precipitate another confrontation between the PRC and the United States in the Taiwan Strait in the future. By modifying U.S. policy as recommended in this paper to include the sale of advanced weapons systems to Taiwan, the potential for future confrontations will be greatly reduced.

Word Count = 5,196

ENDNOTES

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